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Natasha K. Warikoo (2016) ***The Diversity Bargain: And other dilemmas of race, admissions, and meritocracy at elite universities***
Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016, $26 hbk, (ISBN: 978-0226400143) 320pp.

Reviewed by Vikki Boliver, *DURHAM UNIVERSITY*

In 2015 the number of black students admitted to Oxford University reached an all-time high of 37, or 1.5% of the entering class. Although an improvement on the 20-30 black students admitted annually during the preceding decade, something closer to 100 black students would need to be admitted to Oxford each year to match the ethnic composition of young people nationally. Harvard University in the US does rather better. African Americans made up 13.7% of Harvard entrants in 2016, also a record high, and a figure that is only a few percentage points shy of the African American share of 18 year olds nationally. The figure for Brown University, another 'elite' US institution, was rather lower at 6.7% in 2015. However, compared to Oxford, both Harvard and Brown are exceedingly ethnically diverse, with ethnic minority groups making up a little over half of all admitted students. In the US as in the UK, black students are less likely than their white peers to achieve the very high academic entry requirements set by elite universities. Key to achieving an ethnically diverse entering class at Harvard and Brown, therefore, is their use of affirmative action when deciding whom to admit. Natasha Warikoo's book, *The Diversity Bargain*, explores the meanings and implications of ethnic diversity on campus, and of affirmative action as a means of achieving that diversity, from the perspective of students attending Harvard, Brown and Oxford. The study draws on interviews, conducted by Warikoo's research assistants, with 76 US-resident students from the white, black, Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups at Harvard and Brown, and with 67 British-born white and ethnic minority students at Oxford.

The first half of Warikoo's book focuses on students at Harvard and Brown, and begins by elaborating the different 'race frames' students used when talking about ethnic diversity on campus. The vast majority of students, regardless of ethnicity, largely employed what Warikoo calls a 'diversity frame', involving explicit recognition of ethnic and racial differences on campus and a positive regard for diversity as enriching the college experience. Half of the white and Asian students (but notably none of the black or Hispanic students) also invoked a 'color-blindness' frame at times, rejecting the idea that ethnic differences are relevant or noticed, or talking about their own efforts to avoid seeing or responding to difference. Around half of all black and Hispanic students (but only a few white or Asian student, tellingly mostly Sociology majors) employed a 'power analysis frame', emphasising the salience of ethnicity and race as a dimension of power inequality. A minority of students, all white or Asian, were also found to employ a "culture of poverty frame", attributing racial disadvantage to cultural deficits such as poor work ethic.

The dominance of the 'diversity frame' among elite US college students makes sense given that, as Warikoo notes, these universities promote in their students a sense of the educational value of multiculturalism, putting on innumerable study and social events designed to highlight and celebrate diversity. Warikoo shows that an unintended consequence, however, is that white, socioeconomically privileged students at elite US universities regard the efforts of elite universities to be more

accessible to ethnic minority students as constituting a "diversity bargain". White students support, or at least tolerate, policies of affirmative action and multiculturalism because they perceive that it *benefits them* by enriching their own college experience. For many white students, the presence of ethnic minority students on campus is seen as a 'resource' from which they feel entitled to benefit, and which they sometimes feel wrongly deprived of when ethnic minority students do not fully 'integrate'. Moreover, white students support diversity-enhancing practices insofar as they are *benign* with respect to their own chances of success in the competition for prized resources including already-won college places and future internships and graduate jobs. When affirmative action is perceived to be a potential threat to their rightful claims to these prizes, some white students are quick to call the charge of "reverse racism". In short, affirmative action is valued by white students not as a means of restorative justice, nor even as something which contributes to the collective good, but as a personally beneficial resource which might, but thus-far has not, come at any personal cost.

Part two of the book focuses on students at Oxford, where, as at Harvard and Brown, the 'diversity frame' and the 'color-blindness frame' were found to be the most common ways of talking about ethnic diversity on campus. In contrast to the US, however, the 'culture of poverty frame' was more often invoked and the 'power analysis frame' almost entirely absent. Oxford is much less ethnically diverse than Harvard and Brown, and the university does not actively champion multiculturalism. Consequently, most white Oxford students' interactions with peers from other ethnic groups is comparatively limited, restricted to sampling different national cuisines and occasionally attending culturally-themed social events. White Oxford students reported racist jokes being told 'ironically', with the few who object labelled 'politically correct'. Racial injustice was rarely acknowledged and equally rare insinuations of racism were responded to dismissively as "playing the race card".

Unsurprisingly then, almost none of the Oxford students interviewed expressed support for affirmative action, arguing that the university had no responsibility to redress inequalities rooted in wider society. The idea of lowering entry requirements for applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds was rejected as depriving better qualified individuals of a place and setting up comparatively poorly qualified students to fail. None of the Oxford interviewees could envisage how the university might adapt to meet the needs of students with less than stellar educational backgrounds, nor did they see it as legitimate for the university to be expect to do so. Consequently, while the students interviewed believed that all those admitted to Oxford merited their place there irrespective of their ethnicity, they also regarded the under-representation of some ethnic minority groups at Oxford as justifiable on meritocratic grounds and not the university's problem to solve. This, Warikoo argues, is the British version of the 'diversity bargain'.

In the conclusion, Warikoo points out that "…dominant groups in society maintain their advantage in the face of public criticism of inequality by defending the legitimacy of the system that led to their advantage" (p.182). Warikoo challenges elite universities to rethink their part in that system, inviting them to consider what it would mean to scrap the notion of meritocracy and replace it with an admissions lottery. This thought experiment, Warikoo argues, would at least "make clear what distinctions admissions officers are making, why they are making them, and the

implications of those decisions." (p.202). Warikoo's challenge is a useful one to elite universities and sociologists alike.